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Roll Call

Braley, Grassley trade shots over health care effort

By David M. Drucker

Sen. Chuck Grassley's (R-Iowa) office responded forcefully Friday to charges leveled by Rep. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) that the Hawkeye State's senior Senator is playing politics with health care reform and purposely misleading constituents.

In a Huffington Post column published Friday, Braley lashed out at Grassley, the ranking member on the Finance Committee and a key health care negotiator, accusing him of putting his political party ahead of what's best for Iowans.

Braley suggested that Grassley is perpetuating "myths" about elements of the health care bill passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee for the sole purpose of derailing the reform effort. Braley also called into question Grassley's stated desire to work with Democrats to pass a bipartisan health care bill.

"As the important health care debate in Congress moves forward, certain members of the Senate insist on moving backwards. One of those Senators is my friend and constituent, Chuck Grassley," Braley writes. "For someone who claims he wants to help forge a bipartisan health care plan, Senator Grassley sure isn't acting very bipartisan. In fact, he's been behaving like someone who wants to see meaningful health care reform defeated."

"Grassley used scare tactics last week at a town hall meeting in Iowa to convince voters that optional coverage for end-of-life counseling in the House health care reform bill would force people to 'pull the plug on grandma,'" Braley wrote. "He should know that real leadership in Congress means putting the facts before fiction (no matter how difficult that might be), finding common ground, and persuading your colleagues to do the right thing."

Grassley spokeswoman Jill Kozeny responded to Braley on Friday afternoon, saying politics appears to be the second-term Congressman's only motivation in attacking the Senator. Kozeny also criticized Braley for voting for the House Energy and Commerce bill in committee.

"Congressman Braley is the one who might like to go backwards and change his vote for Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi's [D-Calif.] fatally flawed health care bill. It does nothing to reduce health care costs, piles on deficit spending and sets in motion a government takeover of the health care system," Kozeny said. "The Pelosi bill, which Congressman Braley voted for in the House Energy and Commerce Committee, has been rejected loud and clear at the grass roots."

"Unfortunately," Kozeny added, "it looks like Congressman Braley put his party duties as vice chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee ahead of Iowans."

Grassley is one of six Senate Finance Committee members, three Democrats and three Republicans, who are negotiating a bipartisan health care reform bill. The group met via teleconference Thursday evening, and Grassley this week released a statement affirming his support for the bipartisan talk.